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The Clean Up: A Short PIEW SOURCE Story







2077: Dexter DeShawn started from nothing but rose to the top of Night City's underground economy. When new blood slips up on a job, he has to clean up the mess that follows.

Decades after the world was transformed, becoming a backward utopia of hard crime and high technology, the American promise of 'hard work leads to success' endured where everything else fell away to dusty history. The only thing that made sense anymore was that everyone started from the same place: as the dirt under someone else's boot.

Only those who had the will to take something for themselves could achieve their dreams in this dog-eat-dog world.

Dexter DeShawn started from the dirt, from nothing.

His journey began barely after his life did. A child could only do so much in a crime-rich environment but DeShawn made the most of it. Adults relied on young boys to be quiet and attentive, to keep their eyes and ears open. He took it a step further, sharpening his mind as a clairvoyant for danger. DeShawn proved his worth as a child lookout, spotting Corpoconvoys, coppers, and rival gang gunners. He went from watching the streets to watching business meetings as an unassuming variable and identifying treachery and deceit; saving his superiors' lives and pockets again, and again.

In return, DeShawn gained the know-how of building an empire from nothing. He expanded his talents from just judging character to judging quality and talent. He moved from role to role in ever-changing hierarchies, always staying ahead and broadening his horizons. His eyes and mind doubled as his secret superpower, gathering intelligence wherever he went. Information was the truest currency of them all, worth any personal price and more valuable than any Euro Dollar or fired bullet. And along came the protection of that information too; no one could know the totality of DeShawn's being as that would reveal the ingredients to his success.

So, while DeShawn built up a reputation for reliability, he transformed his identity into a caricature of his truth. People could speculate all they want; about his pimp-like attire, or his fondness of all-day shades, but the mystery also bred security. Customers and employees trusted the broker, Dexter DeShawn, only needing to know what they needed to know. Even his enemies could begrudgingly respect him. Because Dexter DeShawn was a name with power, a brand of reliability built on experience and eyes that saw much more than they revealed behind red-square-rims.

He was a fixer, connecting street triggers with well-paying clients. But he only got there by working hard, taking risks, and surviving no matter what. He climbed the social ladder and rose to the top of Night City's lucrative criminal underworld.

His origins served as a reminder to remain sympathetic to the bottomfeeders as he was once among their number. So from time to time, DeShawn saw fit to lend an opportunity to promising new blood, to rise from the dirt as he had. It only took one spectacular job to jumpstart an exciting race to the top. New blood, like this V fellow.

The youthful V started from the dirt, from nothing. But he had big dreams and the drive to take the world for himself. The moment the words "Night City" were first uttered from his lips, his and DeShawn's paths were set to cross.

So DeShawn gave him a job. But then, V went and screwed it up.

Even as his armor-lined luxury car approached No-Tell Motel with the usual company for a clean-up job, DeShawn kept his eyes and neural link drilled to the screens and the Net. The target building set ablaze, gun battle breaking out into the streets. Regular pedestrians caught in a crossfire as V and his idiot-macho friend rushed through downtown Night City with gunmen on their heels.

Oleg, Deshawn's loyal muscle, was quiet as ever, not a peep or even a glance back at his boss from the front seat. He just kept his eyes to the skies and the road. NCPD police aerodynes zipped overhead with their sirens wailing in the direction of downtown and the shootout. T-Bug, one of DeShawn's netrunners-on-payroll, also remained silent – her cybernetic eyes darting between the car's television console and her brow-scrunched, cigar-chewer of a boss.

This wasn't a new experience for Oleg, T-Bug. They handled loose ends like this before. Sometimes rising stars got too big for their breeches too fast. They got sloppy and made a mess for everyone else, and that meant the usual response. Sanitize and disappear.

V and what-his-name, Jackie, made it to their automated combat cab, hired to see this job through and darted away, sporadic gunfire trailing after them. Corpo-news drones pursued lazily, never particularly fascinated with another gunfight on the punk-filled streets of Night City.

Oleg pulled up behind No-Tell Motel along the waterfront, in sight of neon high rises and extensive urban sprawl. The nightlight display was soon swept away as the luxury car descended into a parking garage.

DeShawn was already on the move, as soon as the car came to a halt in a space not too far from the exit, and not too far from the elevator. Appropriate for a hasty bug out. He linked with the local area network and pinged a couple ladies-of-the-night out front, usual low-level contacts looking to get a few more Eddies for small tasks.

"Let me know who is coming and going," DeShawn ordered curtly. A fair-few Eddies exchanged later; he got his wink of affirmation from the prostitutes.

"T-Bug jump the local Net. I want all chatter monitored, no surprises."

"You got it," the hacker-for-hire nodded.

The criminal trio entered the elevator cart and ascended to No-Tell Motel's second floor. Room 2-04, the agreed meet-up.

Open and shut, Oleg sealed the door behind DeShawn and T-Bug and went to stand by it, occasionally examining his feed while keeping an eye on the room like a comfortable sentry. What sanitization op was this for him? Twelfth, thirteenth? Probably more.

T-Bug took to the L-shaped booth bench by the windows, lugging a heavy cybernetic firstaid box that doubled as her mobile hacker station. Real-time hacker, fake-time medical tech.

The room itself was dressed in a cozy, intimate light; colored and decorated appropriately for inducing feelings of comfort, safety, and intimacy for the night hawks that frequented these parts for the reliable one-night stands. Soft pink lighting, leather furnishings, red carpet, extra-soft bed, curved walls. The mini-suite featured a connected bathroom and two mini closets closer to the hallway-side. A false, furnished bookshelf along the far wall. The hallway graffiti and chipped paint did a disservice to the kind of moneymaker the seedy motel was.

No-Tell Motel was an underrated meeting point for more illicit parties and corresponding activities. As the name suggested, anything that happened within these walls never got spoken about elsewhere. The drug trade, illegal cybernetic upgrades, black market weapons, human-trafficking, extramarital affairs, blackmail setup, anything remotely capable of being called morally dubious.

DeShawn could vaguely remember how many upstart enforcers he put down here without examining his external memory. Three, maybe four? He was about to add another name to that shortlist soon enough.

It wasn't long, but it took longer than DeShawn readily expected. Probably a hitch during the getaway.

"He's here," the overly-sweet voice of a hired lookout reported from the motel's front entrance.

"Description?" DeShawn asked.

"Male-looking twenty-something. Augmented cyborg. Fanboy Samurai jacket. Shit haircut. Auto handgun in his ass. Looks bloody, had a rough night."

DeShawn looked to T-Bug who peered both through the motel's camera suite and over the windowsill to the ground below. She turned, nodding in affirmation at the fixer.

"Thank you," DeShawn commented, closing the link.

A couple more minutes passed. Three terse knocks pounded against the aluminum sliding door from the hallway.

Oleg went to peek through the peephole while DeShawn schooled himself, squelching his

distaste for a second. Two chirps from the door as Oleg stepped into V, visible from the doorway. He pushed the young cyberpunk back a step and checked the hall for pursuers or unseen allies. Nobody.

Oleg stepped aside, allowing V to enter the mini-suite. The room's television blared in the background from a Corpo-news channel reporting on the ongoing chaos left in the upstart's wake.

"V, my man," DeShawn greeted with a practiced smile. "You made it; you're blowing up all over the news."

V looked like he was having a rough night. Dried blood caked his hands, undershirt, and

"Are you alone?" DeShawn asked, looking for a hint towards the strange delay.

V paid Oleg a stink-eye, clearly anxious to be done with whatever had gone wrong. He mumbled out, "I just want the money."

"You got the chip?"

V turned his head to the left, displaying the neck-port where a blinking indicator light signified the secured chip of interest.

DeShawn unpuckered the cigar from his lips and turned to T-Bug, "Alright, start it up."

The hacker-for-hire pressed a button on the side of the medical unit, beginning the process of seizing further control of the local area network and creating the cover for V's upcoming demise. The machinery unhinged apart, powering up.

DeShawn turned back to V and gestured with his clutched cigar towards the bathroom. "Why don't you wash up, we'll be with you in a minute."

The young blood grimaced in confusion, attempting to question his employer.

"Come on man, your neck. It's a mess."

V glanced between DeShawn and Oleg before rolling his eyes and disappearing into the closet-sized bathroom. DeShawn watched V walk, a predatory half-grin taking to his cheeks.

V was only gone for a minute or two, as soon as the sink noises stopped – Oleg was at the door, at the ready. DeShawn watched on as Oleg took the confused look on the hired gun's face and smashed it into the door frame, denting the metal superficially and stunning V.

DeShawn had seen V's previous work before, he could admit the youngster was a good fighter. But that was no good when he didn't see the fight coming. The young man's face twisted from confusion to rage, as a fire erupted in his blue eyes.

He instinctually went for his subdermal-stored mantis blades, intent on cutting his attacker to pieces. Oleg got there first, grabbing down before the right arm blade could extend. The second almost took off the loyal bodyguard's head but he parried the attack, pushing the blade up and back, circling V until he was in control.

V walked back, forced by Oleg into the thin wall-mounted television monitor. Another smack shattered the industrial-grade glass, leaving the display flickering.

Oleg contorted V's arms, keeping them crossed over so he couldn't employ his blades, and pushed him against the wall, sapping V's strength. Wrapping around, Oleg directed the youth into a secure headlock. V was tough, but he wasn't quite on his way to becoming an android yet – he still needed to breathe, but he wouldn't be able to do that with a squeezed windpipe.

"Just take the fucking chip, Dex," V gasped out, kneeling on the floor with Oleg wrapped around his neck like a snake.

DeShawn lowered himself and removed his red-tinted shades so the two were eye-to-eye. A growl lifted off his lips as he jabbed a gold-tinted finger at V. "Every Corpo-cop in this city is going to be blasting down these doors after what you and your psycho friend did. We didn't need all this cock-sucking attention dammit."

The fixer took a step back from Oleg and V, slipped on his shades and puckered his cigar before nodding to Oleg. *Finish it*.

V's neck and forehead veins expanded as Oleg squeezed in, intent on quietly ending the young man's life. For a moment, it looked like just another closure to an unfortunate series of events. DeShawn felt little more than pity for the upstart as the life was sucked out of him; he'd seen it plenty of times before.

Something clicked in V though. He tensed up and pushed back, slamming Oleg into the near wall. The two bounced off the broken screen only for Oleg to push back. V used the sudden forward momentum to rocket Oleg over his back, untangling the headlock. Freed and with enough space to extend his mantis blades, Oleg's right hook was halted as his arm was cleaved clean from the bicep. He shouted out in surprise only for V to continue his culinary work, slashing out the bodyguard's leg tendons before stabbing his arm blades into his abdomen.

Oleg's cries descended into groaned gurgles as shock overtook him. DeShawn shuffled back in surprise as V advanced.

"Help me out, Bug! Bug!" DeShawn cried out of desperation, tripping over his own feet and collapsing to the floor.

The African-American hacker rose from her seat, staring V down as her mind and electronics went into overdrive, attempting a frantic, direct-remote hack. V's body immediately convulsed as his mantis blades retracted and his limbs jittered about, going haywire from the system's intrusion.

Command-line code danced across T-Bug's cybernetic eyes as she continued her system intrusion, desperately fighting to gain control over V's body. However, she was giving too much to the hack and was immobilized for it.

She did not scream even as her sense of desperation took control. She could only watch, both from her own eyes and V's vision as he struggled through her system takeover, drawing his pistol and planting a single round in her skull.

DeShawn frantically rose from his fall, reaching for his revolver on the table, and aimed at T-Bug's lifeless body crumpled to the floor. V continued to advance, pistol drawn and directed at the fixer.

Get there first.

DeShawn pulled the trigger once, twice. First shot catching the young cyborg in the shoulder, the next in the head. V never managed to pull the trigger, still struggling through what was left of T-Bug's intrusion and collapsed, similarly lifeless to the floor.

For a moment, the room was still. The whistling and droning noises of Night City entered the room through the compromised window where a bullet had cut through T-Bug's head and carried through the glass behind her. The two massive revolver rounds had punched through V and left sizable craters in the screen behind him – separate from the already damaged surface from Oleg's tussle.

Everybody else was dead. Two loyal, high-quality subordinates were gone, all because of some stupid upstart. DeShawn was going to need more back up and quick, the police would

surely be on their way soon. Another cleanup crew and a new cover story, and a data wipe of the motel's camera and noise sensors and whatever else might leave a paper trail connecting V to DeShawn. He would need to dump the body too.

The fixer began to make a call over his neural link as he gauged the mess before him. He cursed.

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